



STRUCTURED ANALYSIS FAMILY EVALUATION: SAFE

Overview

What is SAFE?

The Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) is a home study method that provides a suite of comprehensive home study tools and practices for the description and evaluation of would-be adoptive, foster or kinship families or for the dual licensure of concurrent planning resource families.

SAFE is helpful and user-friendly for the social worker and is respectful of the family's expectations for open, transparent and fair treatment.

SAFE is built on a foundation of strong practice values and combines information gathering and analysis techniques that assist the social worker to describe and evaluate a family, its characteristics and capabilities. SAFE does not employ standardized pass/fail tests to determine the result of a home study.

Rather, the SAFE questionnaires, Psychosocial Inventory, Desk Guide and Preformatted Home Study Report templates provide social workers a structured method to accomplish uniformly a comprehensive home study that contains a psychosocial evaluation that both illuminates family strengths and addresses issues of concern. SAFE also includes a Matching Inventory to assist the matching of a child's issues and needs with family strengths and capabilities.

SAFE History

The technology behind SAFE has been under development and refinement since 1989. It was in that year that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Adoptions Branch set out to improve the quality of its family evaluations.

The Branch was concerned about the variability and superficiality of the family evaluation process and the all too common inability of adoption caseworkers to detect the "not-so-obvious" unsuitable parents. A comprehensive review of the evaluation tools being used at that time concluded the following:

- **Lack of uniformity:** Critical issues such as substance abuse, family violence, abusive parenting practices and sexual abuse were neither being consistently identified nor uniformly and thoroughly explored.

- **No psychosocial evaluation:** Home study methods did not provide for a psychosocial evaluation. Home study reports were largely limited to verbatim reporting of information the family provided. They routinely lacked a critical analysis of family functioning related to parenting ability and readiness.
- **No effective information gathering or analysis tools:** Information gathering tools, such as the autobiography, were not providing comprehensive or relevant material. Thus, critical information was not being gathered and evaluated uniformly.
- **Judgments based on worker bias:** Judgments were often based on the social worker's personal biases, beliefs or opinions rather than an objective analysis of factors relevant to parental suitability.
- **Frequently irrelevant home study reports:** The home study reports were incomplete and did not contain information relevant to good placement decision-making. They described but did not evaluate and provide meaning to the information gathered regarding the family.

The development of the methods culminating in today's SAFE was guided initially by the pioneering work done in 1985-87 by the Children's Bureau of Los Angeles in its Family Assessment Form (FAF).

SAFE was then created and further developed by the California State Adoption Branch with the help of many collaborators both public and private.

Based in part upon these earlier efforts, in 2003 the Consortium for Children (CFC) a private non-profit agency located in San Rafael, California created today's SAFE, a redesigned, refined and improved "next generation" evaluation and assessment methodology. It is a unique tool for improved social work practice.

In October 2004, CFC received a Federal Adoption Opportunities Grant to expand the use of SAFE to the states of Utah, Texas, Nevada, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Georgia and Oklahoma and to the Cherokee Nation.

The grant was awarded to allow CFC to demonstrate that SAFE:

- Increases worker efficiency
- Improves quality of practice
- Assures accurate child/family matching
- Facilitates concurrent planning
- Eliminates cross-jurisdictional barriers
- Is appropriate for a national model.

It is now in use in five of the grant states. It has also recently been implemented in Colorado and in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Nova Scotia.

Inside SAFE - The Five Specific Components:

1. SAFE Practice Values
2. SAFE Information Gathering Tools
3. SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and Desk Guide
4. SAFE Preformatted Home Study Report
5. SAFE Matching Inventory

SAFE Practice Values

The overall integrity and validity of SAFE and the SAFE process is directly related to adherence to SAFE's eight practice values.

1. Because families are valuable resources for children, the SAFE home study process strives to be inclusive, not exclusive.
2. The psychosocial evaluation is a key component of a SAFE home study.
3. SAFE promotes a mutual evaluation process that recognizes family strengths and identifies and addresses issues of concern.
4. SAFE is built on the belief that families and individuals have the capacity for change
5. The social work interview is the foundation of good social work practice.
6. Social workers must be aware of and understand how personal biases influence their perceptions and determinations.
7. Home studies should never be accomplished without the benefit of supervision or consultation.
8. Families should be advised at the beginning of the home study process that they shall have the opportunity to receive or read a copy of their final written home study report.

SAFE Information Gathering Tools

SAFE uses sophisticated, user friendly and yet seemingly simple questionnaires. SAFE questionnaires are designed to support, supplement and facilitate, not supplant, the social work interview.

The SAFE information gathering tools are specifically targeted to:

- Promote more truthful responses
- Promote increased disclosure
- Facilitate focused interviewing
- Promote information gathering uniformity
- Provide for optimal framing of questions
- Memorialize answers
- Save time for family and worker

SAFE Questionnaire I

This is a questionnaire that provides the social worker with a wealth of information that formerly was gathered laboriously through the autobiography and follow-up process. The use of the structured SAFE questionnaire gives the family the opportunity for reflection and introspection, saves valuable worker time and gives the worker more accurate information as a starting place. The questionnaire contains pointed, closed-ended questions and provides a variety of possible answers for consideration.

The questionnaire covers eight general areas:

- Personal History
- Work
- Family Relationships
- Marital/Domestic Partner Relationship
- Support System
- Parenting Practices
- Personal and Family Values
- Health

SAFE Questionnaire II

This questionnaire is especially important because it covers the more critical and sensitive areas of family functioning that are often overlooked. Applicants complete Questionnaire II during an interview in the presence of the social worker. This practice promotes more truthful disclosure in that respondents cannot compare their answers. Increased disclosure is also promoted by the practice of meeting individually with each applicant immediately after completion of the questionnaire to discuss any concerns or questions generated by the experience.

Questionnaire II covers ten areas:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| • Problem issues/behaviors | • Child abuse |
| • Personal alcohol consumption | allegations/convictions |
| • Personal legal/illegal drug usage | • Family violence and crime |
| • Family substance abuse | • Family sexual perpetrators |
| • History of childhood/adult sexual, emotional or physical victimization | • Domestic violence |
| | • Mental illness |

Psychosocial Inventory and Desk Guide

The Psychosocial Inventory serves as the outline for the psychosocial evaluation contained in the SAFE written home study report. The Psychosocial Inventory contains 68 factors compartmentalized in eight sections. Each factor is rated on a five-point scale. The resulting “Overall Evaluation of Section Rating” then establishes the soundness and integrity of the factors in each section of the Psychosocial Inventory.

The Psychosocial Inventory uses specific criteria to be considered uniformly by every worker in every case, thus insuring that critical issues are not overlooked. Processing information using the Inventory helps to focus subsequent interviews by identifying the areas where more information and further exploration is needed.

The Psychosocial Desk Guide defines each psychosocial factor in the Psychosocial Inventory and provides definitional statements that guide evaluators to the most appropriate numbered rating for each factor.

The process facilitates a clear identification of specific family strengths and issues of concern. The clear and timely identification of issues of concern enables the social worker to articulate succinctly these concerns to the family. Feedback helps the family understand what needs to be changed, if change is necessary, and why change is important. Because judgments are quantified, change is easy to measure over time.

The Psychosocial Inventory contains 68 psychosocial factors listed within the following nine sections.

- History
- Personal Characteristics
- Marital/Domestic Partner Relationship
- Sons/Daughters/Others Residing or Frequently in the Home
- Extended Family Relationships
- Physical/Social Environment
- General Parenting
- Specialized Parenting
- Adoption Issues

SAFE Preformatted Home Study Report

Home Study Templates

SAFE incorporates a preformatted home study report to assist the social worker to record, analyze and memorialize the information, assessments and evaluations that are completed. The preformatted home study templates are customized for each SAFE jurisdiction or agency and are available on a password-protected web site. The web site does not allow for uploading information so no confidential information leaves the control of the agency.

SAFE Matching Inventory

The SAFE Matching Inventory utilizes the SAFE methodology to help Placement Workers determine which families have the capability to meet the needs of a child or youth who is already in the home or for whom a placement is being sought.

The Matching Inventory uses a complementary 5-point scoring system for both the child or youth and the prospective family. Once families are identified, the worker can read the home studies and follow good social work practice to determine the best placement for the child or youth.

Summing Up

SAFE provides state of the art tools for social workers to describe, evaluate and strengthen families in a comprehensive, accurate and sensitive fashion. Its power stems from the totality of its components, each of which complements and buttresses the other. Foundational to SAFE is the practice values that provide an approach and framework for a fair and accurate home study.

(Exhibits)

THE SAFE DESK GUIDE TO THE PSYCHOSOCIAL INVENTORY (Excerpts)

The **SAFE DESK GUIDE** is used in conjunction with the **SAFE Psychosocial Inventory** to complete a psychosocial evaluation of an applicant family. The **SAFE Psychosocial Inventory** and **SAFE DESK GUIDE** are both divided into the following nine sections:

- A.** History
- B.** Personal Characteristics
- C.** Marital/Domestic Partner Relationships
- D.** Sons/Daughters/Others Residing or Frequently in the Home
- E.** Extended Family Relationships
- F.** Physical/Social Environment

- G. General Parenting
- H. Specialized Parenting
- I. Adoption Issues

Each of the nine sections of the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory contains psychosocial factors to be evaluated and then assigned a numbered rating. These factors and their ratings enable the evaluator to identify both family strengths and issues of concern that must be addressed in the Psychosocial Evaluation.

The SAFE DESK GUIDE to the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory provides guidance by providing examples of numbered ratings from 1 to 5 for each of the 68 psychosocial factors. The ratings are defined in the *Definition of Numbered Ratings* section below.

Evaluators are instructed to begin with the initial assumption that each psychosocial factor is properly rated a 2 (*Strength*). Evaluators should move from the rating of 2 (either up or down) only if one or more of the SAFE DESK GUIDE examples for an alternative rating are applicable. If the evaluator identifies another indicator, not listed in any of the SAFE Desk Guide examples, but consistent with a rating other than 2, then the appropriate rating is to be assigned.

Definition of Numbered Ratings	
1	Exceptional Strength Represents exceptional strengths that positively influence safe and/or healthy family functioning and parenting.
2	Strength Represents strengths that positively influence safe and/or healthy family functioning and parenting.
3	Issue of Concern Represents an issue that could or would impede safe and/or healthy family functioning and parenting
4	Major Issue of Concern Represents a more serious issue that could or would impede safe and/or healthy family functioning and parenting
5	Extremely Serious Problem Represents an extremely problematic issue that could or would severely impede safe and/or healthy family functioning and parenting

Sample Section: First of Nine

A. HISTORY

The History Section covers the following areas of the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory:

- A-1 Childhood Family Adaptability
- A-2 Child Family Cohesion
- A-3 Childhood History of Deprivation/Trauma
- A-4 Childhood History of Victimization
- A-5 Adult History of Victimization/Trauma
- A-6 History of Child Abuse/Neglect
- A-7 History of Alcohol/Drug Abuse
- A-8 History of Crime/Arrests/Allegations/Violence
- A-9 Psychiatric History
- A-10 Occupational History
- A-11 Marriage/Domestic Partner Relationships History

Note: In the History Section the first task is to assign factor ratings that accurately reflect the actions and events in an applicant's life. Once accurately determined, these remain unchanged as factor ratings.

The applicant's resolution of (or adaptation to) these actions and events is considered at the point when the Overall Evaluation of Section rating is given. Also considered at that time is the level of effort required by the applicant to maintain any such resolutions or adaptations.

Taken together then, the elements of history, degree of resolution, healthiness of adaptation and level of effort needed to "maintain" allow an evaluation of the history's effect on the applicant's current functioning. The determinations leading to this evaluation must be narrated thoroughly in the History Section of the Home Study Report.

A-1	Childhood Family Adaptability
	<p>Refers to the level of adaptability that existed in the applicant's childhood family as measured on the Circumplex Model Adaptability Dimension. Family adaptability is measured by considering how childhood family communication patterns, acceptance of differences, decision-making, conflict resolution methods, and family roles/rules/expectations impacted the family's response to change. For definitional purposes, "family" refers to the family system the applicant was primarily raised in whether they were blood or non-blood related, e.g. adoptive family, foster family, relative caregivers, etc. For applicants raised in multiple families please construct one overall rating.</p>
Rating	
1	<p>Exceptional Strength: Use this rating when one or more examples for a 2 rating were carried out in an exceptional manner and none of the examples for a rating of 3, 4, or 5 apply</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ family was readily able to make necessary adjustments to accommodate new circumstances and/or relationships ▪ family communication was respectful, clear and well received ▪ family members were ready, willing and able to respectfully accept differences and embrace new family members ▪ family decision making and conflict resolution processes were fair and effective, e.g. the needs, wishes and best interest of the entire family were taken into account ▪ family roles, rules and expectations were age-appropriate, clear and adjustable
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ family occasionally had difficulty making necessary adjustments to accommodate new circumstances and/or relationships, e.g. some family members were resistant to change ▪ communication was respectful but occasionally unclear and confusing, e.g. parent would say one thing and do another ▪ some family members had difficulty accepting differences and "outsiders" into the family ▪ family decision making and/or conflict resolution processes were occasionally unfair and ineffective ▪ family roles, rules and expectations were somewhat unclear or clear, but occasionally age-inappropriate and/or unchangeable
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ family frequently had difficulty making necessary adjustments to accommodate new circumstances and/or relationships, e.g. rigidly resisted necessary change or lapsed into disorganization ▪ communication was frequently unclear and confusing and/or occasionally disrespectful and deceptive ▪ many family members had difficulty accepting differences and "outsiders" into the family ▪ family decision making and/or conflict resolution processes were frequently unfair and ineffective, e.g. decision making process frequently ignored the needs, wishes and best interest of the entire family ▪ family roles, rules and expectations were unclear or clear but frequently age-inappropriate and/or unchangeable, e.g. all children must go to college despite their academic aptitude
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ family was consistently unable to make adjustments to accommodate new circumstances and/or relationships, family functioned on an extreme end of the Circumplex Model Adaptability Dimension ▪ communication was extremely disrespectful, deceptive and/or confusing and unclear ▪ some family members had an extreme intolerance of differences; new family members were rejected ▪ family decision making and/or conflict resolution processes were extremely unfair and ineffective, e.g. family conflicts were consistently dealt with in a hostile manner and often led to physical violence ▪ family roles, rules and expectations were extremely unclear (virtually non-existent) leading to family chaos, or they were clear, but extremely age-inappropriate and dogmatically applied

A. HISTORY		Person # 1					Person # 2				
A-1.	Childhood family adaptability	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-2.	Childhood family cohesion	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-3.	Childhood History of Deprivation/Trauma	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-4.	Childhood History of Victimization	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-5.	Adult History of Victimization/Trauma	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-6.	History of Child Abuse/Neglect	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-7.	History of Alcohol/Drug Use	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-8.	History of Crime/Allegations/Violence	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-9.	Psychiatric history	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-10.	Occupational history	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A-11.	Marriage/domestic partner history	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION:		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Psychosocial Inventory

NOTE: Below is a list of the psychosocial factors found on the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory. Using the Psychosocial Inventory, each factor was considered and rated several times by the social worker during the course of this home study. The ratings below represent the final ratings. The ratings are defined as follows: 1 = an exceptional strength, 2 = a strength, 3 = an issue of concern, 4 = a major issue of concern and 5 = very serious problem. The OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION ratings reflect the degree to which all issues of concern identified in the section were either resolved, mitigated or the prognosis for change.

#1	#2	HISTORY	#1	#2	EXTENDED FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
2	2	Childhood Family Adaptability	2	2	Extended Family Cohesion
2	2	Childhood Family Cohesion	2	2	Extended Family Adaptability
2	2	Childhood History of Deprivation/Trauma	2	2	Relationship with own Extended Family
2	2	Childhood History of Victimization	2	2	Relationship with Spouse's/Partner's Family
2	2	Adult History of Victimization/Trauma	2	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION
2	2	History of Child Abuse/Neglect			
2	2	History of Alcohol/Drug Use			PHYSICAL/SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
2	2	History of Crime/Arrest/Allegations/Violence		2	Cleanliness/Orderliness/Maintenance
2	2	Psychiatric History		2	Safety
2	2	Occupational History		2	Furnishings
2	2	Marriage/Domestic Partner History		2	Play Area/Equipment/Clothing
2	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION		2	Finances
				2	Support System
#1	#2	PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS		2	Household Pets
2	2	Communication		2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION
2	2	Commitment and Responsibility			
2	2	Problem Solving	#1	#2	GENERAL PARENTING
2	2	Interpersonal Relations	2	2	Child Development
2	2	Health and Physical Stamina	2	2	Parenting Style
2	2	Self-esteem	2	2	Disciplinary Methods
2	2	Acceptance of Differences	2	2	Child Supervision
2	2	Coping Skills	2	2	Learning Experiences
2	2	Impulse Control	2	2	Parental Role
2	2	Mood	2	2	Child Interactions
2	2	Anger Management and Resolution	2	2	Communication with Child
2	2	Judgment	2	2	Basic Care
2	2	Adaptability	2	2	Child's Play
2	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION	2	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION
		MARITAL/DOMESTIC PARTNER RELATIONSHIP	#1	#2	SPECIALIZED PARENTING
	2	Conflict Resolution	2	2	Expectations
	2	Emotional Support	2	2	Effects of Abuse/Neglect
	2	Attitude toward Spouse/Partner	2	2	Effects of Sexual Abuse
	2	Communication between Couple	2	2	Effects of Separation and Loss
	2	Balance of Power	2	2	Structure
	2	Stability of the Marriage or Partnership	2	2	Therapeutic/Educational Resources
	2	Sexual Compatibility	2	2	Birth Sibling Relationships
	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION	2	2	Child Background Information
			2	2	Birth Parent Issues
			2	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION
		SONS/DAUGHTERS/OTHERS RESIDING OR FREQUENTLY IN HOME	#1	#2	ADOPTION ISSUES
	2	Minor Sons and Daughters	2	2	Infertility
	2	Minors Residing or Frequently in the Home	2	2	Telling Child about Adoption
	2	Adult Sons and Daughters	2	2	Openness in Adoption
	2	Adults Residing or Frequently in the Home	2	2	Adoptive Parent Status
	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION	2	2	OVERALL EVALUATION OF SECTION

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